

# Striving to Unite. The Russian Sámi and the Nordic Sámi Parliament model

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**Abstract:** This article describes activism in the Russian Federation aimed at reforming indigenous policy by adopting a foreign model – a Nordic-type elected indigenous assembly – for the Sámi of the Russian Federation. Key initiatives from the period ca. 1985–2010 are presented, their origins investigated, and some effects of the activists’ approach are analyzed, as well as certain functions of the original institutions, the Nordic Sámi Parliaments.

**Keywords:** Sámi politics, indigenous rights, ethno-politics, Russian civil society, minority representation

## 1. Introduction

During the last sixty years an ‘indigenous revolution’ of sorts has taken place throughout the world: The lowest-ranked ethnic groups in the hierarchy of nations have become organized, articulated their demands, and won victories on the national and international stage. Activists from ethnic groups living continents apart have developed networks to discuss problems and take joint action, and ILO Convention No. 169 and the UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights have become common points of reference for indigenous rights debates internationally. States have responded in different ways to their indigenous groups’ demands, resulting in a broad range of policy models. The Nordic model is centred around official Sámi Parliaments (SPs) – elected indigenous assemblies established in the period 1989–1995.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Josefsen, E. *Samene og de nasjonale parlamentene* pp. 18–21.

For the Sámi population, divided between three Nordic states and Russia, border-transcending indigenous activism is nothing new: the first international Sámi conference took place in 1917, and in 1956 the first international organization, the Sámi Council,<sup>2</sup> was established.<sup>3</sup> The Russian Sámi, however, were not able to participate in international Sámi politics until the Perestroyka – at which point this meant integrating into the organizational structures of the Nordic Sámi, and entering into a nation-building project with people living under very different conditions.

Today, Russian Sámi participation in pan-Sámi fora is generally expected. As such, their integration has been a success. The internal politics of Russian Sápmi,<sup>4</sup> however, remain very different – most notably, Russia has no Sámi Parliament (SPs). Instead Kola Sámi<sup>5</sup> politics are dominated by civil society organizations (CSOs),<sup>6</sup> the main ones being the Association of Kola Sámi (AKS), and the Non-Governmental Organization of the Murmansk Region Sámi (OOSMO). Since the 1990s there have been various attempts at creating one common political entity for all the Kola Sámi – several inspired by the SPs. This article discusses support for importing this Nordic model, and what results (intended or otherwise) such activism has yielded so far.

Document studies and interviews are the main sources of information. There are inherent methodological challenges to using interviews (inaccurate memories, narrators with personal agendas), so the same questions have been asked of different interviewees in order to get different points of view, and oral accounts have been compared with written material – such as official documents, protocols, and *Lovozeruskaya Pravda*, the newspaper of Lovozero district where most Kola Sámi live.<sup>7</sup> Interviewees have been identified where possible, for increased research transparency and reduced risk of actors making false accusations behind a shield of anonymity. For ethical reasons identified interviewees were allowed to check and correct their quotes, and none have been identified without explicit consent. Some interviewees did not reply to requested quote-checks, and have consequently been rendered anonymous.

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2. International umbrella organization for Sámi civil society organizations, called the Nordic Sámi Council, until the Association of Kola Sámi (see below) joined in 1992.
  3. Henriksen, J. B. *Saami Parliamentary Co-Operation*, pp. 26–27.
  4. Sápmi: the traditional territory of the Sámi. May also refer to the Sámi ethnic collective.
  5. Kola Sámi: synonymous with ‘Russian Sámi,’ Russian Sápmi consisting of the Kola Peninsula.
  6. ‘Civil Society Organization’ is here applied to all member-based organizations not legally part of official structures, and not running in elections to such structures. List of CSOs and other political entities available at the end of this article.
  7. All editions, 1989–1991, 1998–2004, 2007–10.

## 2. Why a Russian Sámi Parliament?

The three existing SPs are not completely similar,<sup>8</sup> and it is beyond the scope of this article to explore all similarities and differences. Still, in the following some common functional characteristics will be introduced, so that one may better understand why this Nordic model may seem attractive to adopt.

### 2.1. A link to the state

The Nordic SPs constitute what Josefsen calls an «indirect path» to political influence, the direct path being ordinary, non-ethnic political structures.<sup>9</sup> The latter are not necessarily a very effective channel for minorities: they are outnumbered, and their voices tend to get drowned out in general political debate.<sup>10</sup> An official body of minority representatives constitutes a collective voice more audible than the scattered shouting of CSOs, particularly if other official organs are formally required to consult it.

Genuine representativeness is key, however. It matters little if the government talks with individuals from a minority group, if said individuals are not perceived by the minority as representing their interests. Cultivating such an illusion of rapport with the minority may hamper the authorities' ability to create well-informed policy, as non-representative middlemen may fail to accurately reflect the problems and preferences of the people concerned.<sup>11</sup> Judging by interviews with Kola Sámi activists, the need for an officially recognized representative organ to voice their political interests is a central driving force behind initiatives for a Kola SP.

[A Sámi Parliament is] a cooperative organ between the authorities and the Sámi leaders ... democratically elected, and governmental funds go through it.<sup>12</sup>

... an organ under the government or another level of the state, with the right to make legislative initiatives, make decisions that have to do with the Sámi population, land and reindeer herding. It must have a veto right in Sámi affairs. Also, it must be an elected organ. It should receive financing for its activities from the Russian

8. Josefsen, E. *Samene og de nasjonale parlamentene*, pp. 18–22

9. Op. cit. pp. 7, 14–18.

10. Bjerkli, B. & P. Selle 2003 p. 54; Josefsen, E. *Samene og de nasjonale parlamentene* p. 18; Wessendorf, K: *An indigenous parliament?* Pp. 12–13

11. Cf. Minde 2005 pp. 78, 92–93.

12. Interview, Anna Afanas'yeva (youth organization Sám' Nurash' leader 2009–10) Murmansk 22.04.10.

government, and nothing else. It must be independent from the authority structures on the decision-making level.<sup>13</sup>

Notably, several local interviewees (both pro-SP and sceptics) used terms when discussing the Sámi Parliaments that implied more power to the SPs than any of them actually have – these being consultative organs more than decision-making organs. Rantala argues that such impressions may stem in part from the term ‘parliament,’ as this is «perceived much more literally [in Russia] than in the Nordic states,» carrying strong connotations to a high level of authority that for example the Norwegian/Swedish term *Sameting* does not.<sup>14</sup> One interviewee similarly commented that «the word ‘parliament’ scares the bureaucrats. (...) We need another kind of organ here. Another name, but working closely with the Murmansk government.»<sup>[15]16</sup>

In any case, many interviewees felt that an SP would at least have enough influence to address major issues such as language revival, and protection of traditional usage of land and resources. Both pro- and anti-SP interviewees refer to a widespread perception within their group, that the SPs have been successful in this respect:

We consider the Sámi Parliaments to be organizations that radically changed the life of the Sámi. Like the Norwegian example.<sup>17</sup>

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13. Interview, Monchegorsk NCA members (Andrey Belozerov, Vasilitsa Belozerova, Andrey Danilov (also member of Kola Sámi Assembly and SUPS), Vera Pepina), Monchegorsk 24.04.10. See list of CSOs and other Sámi political entities at end of article.
  14. Rantala, L: *Inlägg i Murmansk 02.10.2009*. *Ting* is used for the Norwegian Parliament (*Stortinget*), but also several non-legislative assemblies – f.ex. county assemblies (*fylkesting*) and the national conference for youth- and children-oriented CSOs (*barne- og ungdomsting*). In (North) Sámi, the official term is *Sámediggi*, rather than f.ex. ‘*Sáme parlameanta*’. The Russian term is *Saamskiy parlament*, a direct translation of the generally used English term. In fact, though, *parlament* is not strictly limited to legislative assemblies in Russia either – there are, for example, several so-called ‘youth parliaments’ [*molodyozhnye parlamenti*] in the federation.
  15. Murmansk region: co-terminus with the Kola Peninsula.
  16. Kola Sámi activist interviewed spring of 2010. Did not reply after proofreading, therefore anonymized.
  17. Interview, Natal’ya Gavrilova (Apatity NCA leader) Apatity 23.04.10.

I think this idea of a Russian Sámi Parliament originated abroad. In any case, the roots of the idea lie in the West. People go there and see how good everything is, and ask how this has happened, and they are told «we have a Sámi Parliament.»<sup>18</sup>

## 2.2. Uniting the Sámi internationally

The Sámi Parliaments do not only represent their constituencies *vis-à-vis* the states, but also speak on their behalf with foreign and intergovernmental entities.<sup>19</sup> In interviews, however, the border-transcending potential of a Kola SP was only brought up in relation to its *pan-Sámi* role.

‘Pan-Sámism’ here refers to the ideological current in Sámi politics which focuses on increased international Sámi cooperation and standardization of different states’ Sámi laws and policies. One example of this is the Sámi Political Program of 1980 – a joint statement from Nordic Sámi activists calling for similar reforms in their countries. Among these are that «in each state a representative Sámi assembly or other representative Sámi organ shall be recognized by law,»<sup>20</sup> a demand eventually answered through the creation of the SPs. A more recent example is the 2005 Draft Nordic Sámi Convention, which aims to standardize Sámi rights in Finland, Norway and Sweden – including the right to Sámi Parliaments.<sup>21</sup>

Although the SPs are organs of separate states and predominantly focused on domestic matters, they do have a symbolic pan-Sámi aspect – their existence constitutes a border-transcending similarity between the different states’ Sámi communities. More importantly though, they also play a role at the level of practical pan-Sámi cooperation: since 2000 they have worked together in the Sámi Parliamentary Council,<sup>22</sup> which together with the Sámi Council forms the heart of institutionalized pan-Sámism. While the Kola Sámi are fully represented in the Sámi Council, they remain only participating observers in the Sámi Parliamentary Council. This is in itself an incentive for wanting a Russian SP. In the words of AKS ex-leader Nina Afanas’yeva:

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18. Interview, Andrey Ageyev (GOU leader 2004–09, Coordination Council leader 2006–08) Murmansk 22.04.10. Note that the favourable situation of the Nordic Sámi of course is not only linked to the SPs, as the interviewee says some believe, but also a consequence of policies that predated the SPs.
  19. Cf. Bjerkli & Selle 2003 pp. 83–5; Broderstad 2003 pp. 164–74; *Samisk parlamentarisk råds virksomhetsplan 1.11.2008–31.12.2010* (2.8).
  20. Samepolitisk program, 1980 p. 11.
  21. *Nordisk samekonvensjon, utkast fra finsk-norsk-svensk-samisk ekspertgruppe, avgitt 26. oktober 2005* (Art. 14).
  22. This entity does in fact use the term ‘parliament’ also in domestic languages (f.ex. North Sámi: *Sámi parlamentáralaš ráddi*, Norwegian: *Samisk parlamentarisk råd* etc).

We have no parliament, no president.<sup>[23]</sup> Of course this [the Sámi Parliamentary Cooperation] meant that a Sámi Parliament of our own became even more important.<sup>24</sup>

According to N. Afanas'yeva the idea of a Russian SP was first discussed at the 1992 Sámi Conference,<sup>25</sup> which united the Sámi of all four countries by approving AKS as a Sámi Council member,<sup>26</sup> establishing the common 'Sámi People's Day,' and approving an anthem, the 'Song of the Sámi People.'<sup>27</sup> It was thus in keeping with the spirit of the conference that the Russian delegation concluded that the Sámi are «one people and ought to attempt having the same systems.» The AKS subsequently began to work towards a Kola Sámi Parliament.<sup>28</sup> Despite this, however, no local interviewees, other than N. Afanas'yeva, emphasized the pan-Sámi symbolic or practical role of a Kola SP. Central pro-SP activist Valentina Sovkina even downplayed the importance of this 'ambassador role' explicitly, focusing instead on an SP's function as a minority-authority link (cf. 2.1).

We mainly want Russia to notice us, not the West. We need our own Sámi laws and help from our own government. That's why we want a Sámi Parliament.<sup>29</sup>

### 2.3. Uniting the Sámi internally

The SPs play a more important role when it comes to uniting the Sámi population at the *intra-state* level than internationally. Each country's Sámi population is divided into cultural-linguistic subgroups, different (traditional and non-traditional) professions, organizational-political camps, etc. An SP ideally serves as a common focal point for different sections of Sámi society by virtue of being a common forum, provider of grants to civil society, and a collective voice. In order to succeed at uniting the people, however, popular legitimacy is needed. One way in which the SPs attempt to secure this is through regular, contested, democratic elections –

23. The heads of the SPs are called presidents.

24. Interview, N. Afanas'yeva (AKS leader 1992–2010, member of Initiative Group, SUPS and Kola Sámi Assembly), Murmansk 01.05.10.

25. Interview, N. Afanas'yeva, Murmansk 23.11.09, 01.05.10.

26. Although the Sámi womens' CSO *Sáhráhkka* was the first truly pan-Sámi organization, the Kola Sámi being formally included from 1991 (Hætta, O. H. 2003 *Urfolks organiserings...* p. 49).

27. Rantala, L: *Samerådet 50 år* pp. 10–1; *Samernas 15. konferens, Helsinki 15.-17.6.1992* pp. 85–94. The song's lyrics and the Sámi flag were agreed upon at the 1986 Sámi Conference, with no Kola Sámi representation (*Samernas XIII konferens. Åre 13.-15-8-1986* pp. 99–100, 133–40).

28. Interview, N. Afanas'yeva, Murmansk 01.05.10.

29. Interview, Sovkina (leader of Initiative Group, SUPS and Kola Sámi Assembly) Lovozero 26.04.10.

ideally ensuring that various internal groups are represented, and that the politics of the assembly's majority is in line with popular opinion.<sup>30</sup> Once again, we see that genuine representativeness plays a central role.

In contrast to local interviewees' silence regarding the desired Kola SP's potential as an agent of pan-Sámi unification, people tended to emphasise what such an institution could do to unite the Sámi domestically. For more than a decade, Kola Sámi civil society has been fragmented, lacking a universally-acknowledged political centre. Many interviewees, such as the activist quoted below, focused on the internally-unifying function as a key benefit of having a Sámi Parliament:

[a Sámi Parliament] can unite us, all the organizations, the entire people ... Now there are all these councils and all these [CSOs] ... There's too little unity among us.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.4. A return to a better past?

Lastly, increased interest in a Kola Sámi Parliament is to some extent inspired by new awareness about, and discourses on, local history. At the 2002 conference 'People and land,' Norwegian Sámi researcher Johan A. Kalstad held a lecture called 'the *Siyt*<sup>[32]</sup> and the Sámi Parliament in old Russia.'<sup>33</sup> The 'Sámi Parliament' in question was the *Koladak Sobbar* of the late 1800s, an annual meeting of Sámi representatives and Russian bureaucrats that debated and decided on issues relevant to the indigenous people.<sup>34</sup> Several activists confirmed that this was a source of inspiration to them, including V. Sovkina:

That Kalstad found this out clearly had an influence on us, I know it had on me. We didn't know that there had been such an assembly earlier. Sometimes history is silent about the good things ... So we ask ourselves, why shouldn't we return to that which we had before?<sup>35</sup>

30. Cf. Bjerkli, B. & P. Selle 2003, pp. 49, 81–3.

31. Kola Sámi activist interviewed spring of 2010. Did not reply after proofreading, therefore anonymized.

32. *Siyts*: groups of Sámi who shared natural resources within a delimited area.

33. Bol'shakova, N: *Zhizn', obychai i mifov...* p. 226; Interview, Yelena Yakovleva (Korolyova) (Initiative Group member, former head of *obshchina* Kil'din, AKS leader 2010–) 24.11.09 and 02.05.10, Murmansk.

34. Kalstad, Y.A.: *Dorogoy nadezhd...* pp. 20–28.

35. Interview, Sovkina, Lovozero 26.04.10. Tanner (1929 pp. 332–8) in fact wrote about the *Koladak Sobbar* over 70 years earlier, but knowledge about the assembly was virtually unknown among the Kola Sámi population before Kalstad spread the word.

## 2.5. Critics and sceptics

While a clear majority of interviewees supported a Kola SP, some were more sceptical. One interviewee argued that Russia already has an organization fulfilling their needs:

... we have RAIPON. That is in its way a Sámi Parliament for all the indigenous minority peoples of Russia. It just has an advisory role, but it's very influential. If Murmansk region were a sovereign republic, a Sámi Parliament could happen here too, of course. But not in real life.<sup>36</sup>

RAIPON does serve as a unifying entity for Russian indigenous peoples, and represents them both abroad and *vis-à-vis* federal authorities. The CSO network also attempts to ensure genuine representativeness, its leadership being elected at a congress every four years. It has been suggested, at times with explicit reference to the SP model, that RAIPON could be legally defined as the 'authorized representative' of the Russian indigenous peoples.<sup>37</sup> However, Kola Sámi activists still have some reason to want a separate Sámi assembly: (1) Only one of the Sámi CSOs is a RAIPON member (AKS), creating a representativeness problem. (2) The Sámi are a very small part of RAIPON's constituency,<sup>38</sup> so it cannot prioritize them to the same extent as a Sámi assembly would. (3) RAIPON does not facilitate pan-Sámi unification, but rather *Russian indigenous* unification. (4) The creation of a Kola SP would not necessarily exclude the Kola Sámi from continuing to work via RAIPON – activists do not have to choose between them.

Other interviewees, while not necessarily anti-SP, characterized the idea of importing the SP model as unrealistic:

... it's a good idea. Some organ to decide the affairs of the Sámi. But in Russia we can't have that. There are so many indigenous peoples here. If each and every one of them has a parliament, that just won't work. So they won't allow it. We need to find another compromise with the government.<sup>39</sup>

... what they have over in the West, that's good. But there are a lot more Sámi there. And no other nationalities. We have so many peoples. And a parliament is a legisla-

36. Interview, Ageyev, Murmansk 22.04.10.

37. Wessendorf, K. *An indigenous parliament?* pp. 24–5, 64–7; Mikkelsen, C. *The indigenous world 2010* p. 43.

38. While the largest group (Nenets) is 41,202 people, only 1,991 Russians consider themselves Sámi (2002 Census data).

39. Kola Sámi activist interviewed spring of 2010. Did not reply after proofreading, therefore anonymous.



tive organ, it's a very serious thing. I don't think Murmansk region has money to give two thousand people a parliament.<sup>40</sup>

Note again the tendency to discuss the envisioned Sámi Parliament in ways that do not mirror the authority of the actually existing SPs – for example by using phrases like «decide the affairs» and «legislative organ.» In any case, despite varying conceptions about what the SPs are, how the model can be imported to Russia, and whether it is desirable or even realistic, all interviewees seemed to agree on one thing: the need for some form of representative structure to unite the Kola Sámi (cf. 2.3) and voice their concerns vis-à-vis the authorities (cf. 2.1). Its pan-Sámi role (2.2) was given much less emphasis. We next outline attempts to create such an entity, comparing them to the functional characteristics of the SPs presented here.

### 3. Uniting and representing the Kola Sámi

#### 3.1. The unipolar phase

Kola Sámi civil society has its roots in the 1980s, when an *intelligentsia* began working to revitalize Sámi culture and language, and connect with Nordic kin.<sup>41</sup> This pre-organizational phase culminated and ended in 1989 with the formation of AKS. The AKS dominated Kola Sámi politics until 1998, when competition arose from OOSMO. Hence 1989–1998 is referred to here as the 'unipolar phase' of modern Kola Sámi political history. During the pre-organizational phase, SPs were not yet the norm for Sámi political organization. A Finnish Sámi elected assembly had existed since 1972, but it was only in AKS' founding year that the Norwegian Sámi Parliament opened, and Sweden decided to establish their own.<sup>42</sup> AKS did, however, have some functional similarities with the ascendant Nordic institutions: it had a democratic structure, proclaimed itself «the unitary organ of Soviet Sámi society,» claimed the right to work with the authorities on issues affecting their people, and represented their group in pan-Sámi and other international fora.<sup>43</sup> The main difference lay in their relationship with the authorities: while AKS worked towards the federal level through RAIPON, they were not accepted as the sole representatives of the Kola Sámi by regional authorities. AKS

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40. As above.

41. Utvik, U: *Kolasamene* p. 15; Overland, I. N: *Politics and culture...* p. 106; Kalstad, Y. A: *Dorogoy nadezhd...* pp. 51–52.

42. Josefsen, E. *Samene og de nasjonale parlamentene* pp. 18–21. The Norwegian law on the SP came in 1987, the Swedish SP opened in 1993 and the Finnish 'Sámi Delegation' was reorganized into a Sámi Parliament in 1995.

43. *Ustav Assotsiatsii kol'skikh saamov*: Arts. 1, 2, 5 (*Lovozerskaya Pravda* 09.09.1989).

leader N. Afanas'yeva did become the Governor's personal advisor on indigenous issues, but in addition, the Committee on Indigenous Issues was created – consisting of one Sámi and one non-Sámi. Both forms of dialogue with the minority clearly had representativeness problems: only two Sámi individuals were involved, and both selected from above.

Sámi Council participation soon inspired AKS to discuss a Russian SP, and in a 1995 letter to *Polyarnaya Pravda*, Zinaida Kal'te, who headed AKS' working group for a Kola Sámi Parliament<sup>44</sup> publicly presented the demand. The 1996 international Sámi Conference produced the Murmansk Declaration, which underscored the need to consider a «popularly elected Sámi organ on the Russian side [of the border].» In her closing speech, N. Afanas'yeva states that although the Kola Sámi would work towards this goal, one «may have to wait long for results to manifest.»<sup>45</sup> These words proved prophetic. Interviewees stated that pro-SP activism encountered resistance from certain regional officials – some of whom «started saying that 'the Sámi want a state of their own,' and such things».<sup>46</sup> However, there also seems to have been little active popular support for the idea:

... people just weren't ready. They didn't understand what a Sámi Parliament was, they didn't get enough information about what functions it would have. So it ended up as just an internal discussion in AKS.<sup>47</sup>

With OOSMO's establishment in 1998, AKS lost its position as the sole unifier of the Kola Sámi. OOSMO also began representing them abroad, becoming Sámi Council members in 2000.<sup>48</sup> N. Afanas'yeva claims that the 1998 schism was due to official agencies fomenting discord, not wanting the Sámi to be united, and desiring to protect the Committee on Indigenous Issues – which she had attempted to have disbanded.<sup>49</sup> However, accusations of a democracy deficit in AKS had been

44. Also member of the early 1990s' Sámi Council legal committee, which debated an envisioned pan-Sámi rights convention (*Samernas 16. konferens. Murmansk 15.-18.10.1996* p. 78). This evolved into the Nordic Sámi Convention project.

45. *Samernas 16. konferens. Murmansk 15.-18.10.1996* pp. 84, 87; cf. Sharshina, N. and Ye. Yakovleva: *Perviy s'yezd saamov...; Proyekt «Saamskiy Parlament Kol'skikh Saamov»* (OOSMO project document, year of production not given).

46. Interview, Aleksandr Kobelev (OOSMO leader 1998–2008; member of the Initiative Group and SUPS), Lovozero 26.04.10. False accusations of separatism were brought against the Kola Sámi for the first time during the Stalinist purges, leading to executions and imprisonings (Larsson-Kalvemo, A. *Fighting for survival*, pp. 32–4).

47. Interview, Yakovleva, Murmansk 03.05.10.

48. Rantala, L. *Samerâdet 50 år*, p. 12.

49. Interview, N. Afanas'yeva, Murmansk 01.05.10.

made before 1998, and were among the explicit reasons for founding OOSMO.<sup>50</sup> Hence the schism should not only be understood as the event causing AKS to lose its position, but also as the expression of a crisis in popular trust: there was no longer a consensus on AKS being the unifier and sole representative of the Kola Sámi.

After OOSMO more Sámi organizations began to appear. Kola Sámi political history now entered its ongoing ‘multipolar phase,’ making the need for some common structure more acute.

### 3.2. White Reindeer

In 1999, OOSMO representatives met with people from the Danish aid organization Infonor at a reindeer herding conference in Sweden. Infonor felt that OOSMO deserved their support, since «they were a new organization based in Lovozero where most Sámi live. AKS already had an office in Murmansk and their own contacts in the Nordic countries and Germany.»<sup>51</sup>

Infonor began sponsoring OOSMO with an office and equipment, and two salaried employees. The joint project ‘White Reindeer’ was soon initiated, aiming to «create structures for self-government and coordination.»<sup>52</sup> The concept of a Kola SP was brought up, and Infonor had a law firm investigate the possibilities. They concluded that «it will not be possible to copy the Sámi Parliament completely under Russian conditions. It is, however, fully realistic to form an analogous structure, taking into account Russian specifics.» They pointed to the establishment of ‘national-cultural autonomies’ (NCAs) as a realistic alternative, and not very time-consuming.<sup>53</sup> According to federal law, NCAs are civil society organizations where members of ethnic minorities «decide on issues linked to the conservation of their heritage, language development, education and national culture.» Not being official organs, they do not have formal power, and have nothing to do with territorial autonomy.<sup>54</sup> White Reindeer decided on this option.

Sámi NCAs were established in Revda and Monchegorsk in 2007,<sup>55</sup> and in Apatity in 2009,<sup>56</sup> and aim to eventually unite into a ‘regional autonomy.’<sup>57</sup> Hypothetically this could serve as a unifying structure for the Kola Sámi: the NCAs have democratic structures and bridge the AKS-OOSMO gap, despite being rooted in an

50. Overland, I. N. *Politics and leadership...* pp. 190, 259–62.

51. Interview, Claus Oreskov (Infonor leader), telephone and email 15.05.10.

52. Interview, Kobelev, Lovozero 26.04.10.

53. *Den juridiske gennemgang av Den hvide ren III*. Document supplied by Infonor.

54. Federal law ‘O natsional’no-kul’tur’noy avtonomii’: Arts. 1, 4.

55. *Avsluttende rapport. UM j.nr.104.N.548.b.1 (12.10.08)*. Document supplied by Infonor.

56. Interview, Gavrilova, Apatity 23.04.10.

57. Interviews: Monchegorsk NCA, Monchegorsk 24.04.10; Gavrilova, Apatity 23.04.10.

OOSMO project<sup>58</sup> – they were expressly presented in *Lovozerskaya Pravda* as intended to «protect the interests and rights of all Sámi: be they members of AKS or OOSMO.»<sup>59</sup> People from both CSOs participated at the first founding meeting (along with other Sámi political entities), and activists come from different backgrounds. Also, as Osipov points out, and as underscored by one NCA leader, NCAs have enjoyed high symbolic recognition in the Russian populace.<sup>60</sup> One interviewee though, expressed a notion that this form of organization was intended for «immigrants,» and hence unfitting for an indigenous people.<sup>61</sup>

A possible stumbling block is that NCAs are based in urban areas, and thus may encounter difficulties achieving legitimacy as representatives of the rural Sámi population. NCA activists themselves described what they are doing as an urban form of indigenous organization:

... it works well here, where there are few Sámi, but in Lovozero there are organizations, *sovkhoses*,<sup>[62]</sup> they are living compactly (...) Here we are spread among many others. This is our way of uniting.<sup>63</sup>

It may also be seen as problematic that the NCAs receive funding from the municipalities. This may be construed as a form of dependency, an unfortunate position for an organ that represents minority interests *vis-à-vis* official authorities. If so, the same problem is shared by the existing SPs, these being financed by their states.

However, the NCAs should not be judged according to these criteria. Although White Reindeer was initially inspired by the SPs, the end result of the project was something wholly different: a network of urban Sámi culture-oriented CSOs.

### 3.3. Region-driven unification

Regional authorities disbanded the Committee on Indigenous Issues in 2004, and established the Official Regional Agency 'Centre for indigenous minorities of the North' (commonly referred to as 'GOU') – a non-commercial organization founded and funded by the regional government, charged with representing Sámi interests at all levels of society, preparing and realizing projects and programs aimed at improving their social situation, defending their rights to «historical and

58. In Yona, Kovdor District, the local AKS chapter cooperated with OOSMO and Infonor on 'White Reindeer' (Interview, Oreskov 26.04.10).

59. «Natsional'noy kultur'noy avtonomii – byt'!» in *Lovozerskaya Pravda*, 30.03.07.

60. Osipov 2010 pp. 40, 42, 53–57; interview, Gavrilova, Apatity 23.04.10.

61. Interview, N. Afanas'yeva, Murmansk 01.05.10.

62. *Sovkhoz*: State farm. Large Kola reindeer herding companies still often referred to as such, despite post-Soviet restructuring.

63. Interview, Monchegorsk NCA, Monchegorsk 24.04.10.

cultural, social and economical development» and their «ancient area of habitat, traditional life and economy.» GOU's Charter opened for cooperation with foreign organizations,<sup>64</sup> but AKS/OOSMO remained the main 'ambassadors' of the Kola Sámi.<sup>65</sup> GOU had some potential to fulfill two other SP functions: their intended role in policy-making and execution would make them a natural point of orientation for Kola Sámi civil society, and they were explicitly charged with voicing Sámi interests. However, although the leader and some staff were Sámi, GOU was not yet rooted in any form of democratic representation.

In 2006 GOU established the Coordination Council, including representatives from all 18 Kola Sámi CSOs,<sup>66</sup> and referred to by some as «the first common organ of the Sámi organizations – a bridge between the Sámi people and the official powers.»<sup>67</sup> Despite in principle providing the group with a unifying, rather representative organ well connected with the authorities, interviewees generally agreed that the GOU/Coordination Council structure did not work. Some focused on (1) problematic relations between the council and the authorities, others on (2) internal friction – particularly between AKS/OOSMO and certain *obshchiny*.

*Obshchiny* (sing. *obshchina*) are non-commercial kin/community-based membership organizations aimed at the «defence of [indigenous peoples'] ancient habitats, traditional ways of life, rights and legal interests.»<sup>68</sup> A Sámi *obshchina* pioneer, Ye. Yakovleva, stated in a 2003 article that although AKS had done much, it consisted of «people with higher education and stable incomes.» She argued that the Sámi majority, not part of this class, would benefit from a return to traditional activities like kin-based reindeer herding<sup>69</sup> – which *obshchiny* could provide. In the new millennium, several such CSOs were established on the Kola Peninsula.

Certain *obshchina* interviewees displayed scepticism or even outright enmity towards AKS/OOSMO. One former *obshchina* representative in the Coordination Council stated that the presence of AKS/OOSMO caused «fighting and disorder – we just lost interest in going there,»<sup>70</sup> while another referred to the council as

64. *Ustav gosudarstvennogo oblastnogo uchrezhdeniya 'Murmanskiy oblastnoy tsentr korennykh malochislennkh narodov severa*: Art 3.2.

65. GOU did have one cooperative venture with the Finnish Sámi Education Institute, according to Ageyev (interview, Murmansk 22.04.10).

66. Cf. Gov-murman.ru: *Koordinatsionniy sovet pri gosudarstvennom oblastnom uchrezhdenii «Murmanskiy oblastnoy tsentr korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa»*.

67. Sharshina, N. and Ye. Yakovleva: *Perviy s'yezd saamov...*

68. Federal law 'Ob obshchikh printsipakh organizatsiy obshchin korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa, Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka Rossiyskoy Federatsiy: Introduction (Arts. 1 & 5).

69. Cited in Kalstad, Y. A: *Dorogoy nadezhd...* pp... 56, 64–66.

70. Sámi CSO activist interviewed spring of 2010. Did not reply after proofreading, therefore anonymized.

«full of ... the kind of Sámi that form the basis for the non-governmental organizations. They aren't interested in us and what we do, the traditional way of life. Fishing, reindeer, hunting, land. Those people who go over to you and say 'we are the Sámi' – they don't represent us.»<sup>71</sup>

The anti-AKS/OOSMO discourse articulated here seems related to a phenomenon noted by both Overland and Vladimirova: Sámi CSOs are perceived by some people as self-enrichment tools for activists – urban and educated Sámi. Vladimirova discusses such accusations of 'egoism' towards the *obshchiny*, but it seems that similar attitudes are also found within some of these towards the larger CSOs.<sup>72</sup>

While version 2 links GOU's eventual disbanding of the Coordination Council in 2008 to an inability to «solve problems constructively»,<sup>73</sup> and quorum problems due to certain *obshchiny* having stopped attending, version 1 states that the council's main 'problem' resulted from clashing with the authorities over certain issues:

Many decisions that the council made were not listened to by the regional authorities, important questions were not solved. As we know, the interests of the Sámi and the authorities do not always coincide.<sup>74</sup>

In April 2008, before being disbanded, the Coordination Council recognized the Initiative Group for a Kola Sámi Parliament and declared that the Coordination Council constituted the «highest political authority» of the Kola Sámi until the First Congress of the Murmansk region Sámi in December 2008.<sup>75</sup>

### 3.4. The joint initiative

In March 2008 AKS/OOSMO jointly created an Initiative Group for a Kola SP – having signed a written agreement on cooperation in 2007.<sup>76,77</sup> According to the Initiative Group's leader, V. Sovkina, this renewed desire for a Russian SP stemmed from increased industrialization and tourism threatening traditional Sámi land

71. Sámi CSO activist, requested anonymity.

72. Overland, I.N: *Politics and culture...*; Vladimirova, V. *Just labor...* pp. 29–35.

73. Interview, Ageyev, Murmansk 22.04.10.

74. Sharshina, N. and Ye. Yakovleva: *Perviy s'yezd saamov...*

75. Sovkina, V: *Saamskiy parlament*.

76. Interviews: Kobelev, Lovozero 26.04.10; Sovkina, Lovozero 26.11.09; cf. Sovkina, V: *Saamskiy parlament*.

77. The Initiative Group had four members from each of the two 'big' CSOs. One member also represented the Monchegorsk NCA, and one headed an *obshchina*, though was not listed as such. Six were listed as members of the pan-Sámi network Sámi Womens' Forum.

usage, which again entailed «the disappearance of the Sámi as a separate ethnos.»<sup>78</sup> Discontent with existing representative structures was also an issue:

The Coordination Council should have decided matters and GOU executed its decisions. That would have been a Sámi Parliament. Except that in the Council there were only the leaders of the organizations, not elected people.<sup>79</sup>

The Initiative Group originally wanted an SP at the federal level. When met with the counter-argument that all of Russia's indigenous groups could not each have their own 'parliament,' they first debated whether the arrangement could be offered only to *border-transcending* indigenous peoples, but ended up suggesting an indigenous-elected second chamber of the regional parliament – pointing to a federal law giving provinces the right to establish such entities.<sup>80</sup> When this position did not meet with support, they proposed a separate council of elected Sámi representatives funded by the authorities, and representing the group both internationally – «including in international unions of the Sámi people» – and at the regional level.<sup>81</sup> Regional authorities suggested a different model: a Sámi Congress would vote for representatives which would subsequently be approved by the Governor.<sup>82</sup> It was proposed to hold a 'First Congress of the Murmansk region Sámi' in December, in order to debate indigenous issues, including the Sámi Parliament issue, and give officials advice.<sup>83</sup>

### 3.5. The First Congress

Delegates to the First Congress were to be elected at local gatherings of Sámi individuals, but some activists were dissatisfied with the quality of the information given prior to said elections – arguing that it resulted in low voter turnout, thus

78. Sovkina, V: *Saamskiy parlament*.

79. Interview, Sovkina, Lovozero 26.11.09.

80. Sovkina, V: *Saamskiy parlament*; Federal law 'O garantiyakh prav korennykh malochislennykh narodov Rossiyskoy Federatsii' (Art. 6.8) states that in order to defend traditional indigenous economic activities, ways of life and industries, provinces (regions, autonomous areas etc.) may create official councils of indigenous representatives.

81. Interview, Sovkina, Lovozero 22.04.10; Sovkina, V. *Saamskiy parlament*; *Proyekt: Polozheniye o sovete upolnomochyonnykh predstaviteley saamov murmanskoj oblasti (saamskom parlamente)* (Initiative Group document, 2008).

82. Sharshina, N. and Ye. Yakovleva: *Perviy s'yezd saamov...*; Nr.k.no: Kola-samer vil ha eget sameting, [http://img.nrk.no/kanal/nrk\\_sami\\_radio/1.6206117](http://img.nrk.no/kanal/nrk_sami_radio/1.6206117) (accessed 25.08.10); interview, Ageyev, Murmansk 22.04.10.

83. *Polozheniye o poryadke organizatsii i provedeniya pervogo s'yezda korenного malochislennogo naroda Rossiyskoy Federatsiy (saamov) prozhivayushchego v Murmanskoj oblasti* (Art. 1.1., 2.1., 3.3., 9.1).



skewing results. In many localities, new elections were arranged by such activists, choosing other delegates that also came to the First Congress. Furthermore, on the day of the congress several elected delegates themselves did not appear, instead sending others in their place.

At the congress the relationship between the indigenous assembly and regional authorities became an issue. One of the Initiative Group faction's main concerns was that the government should not be able to silence the organ or remove people from it. Sovkina states that they wanted «a unitary, elected organ, and not just a new [CSO]» – independent, but «not in the sense of a separate private institution.»<sup>84</sup> Interviews indicate that there was some confusion about what 'independence' actually meant in practice, and disagreement about how much 'independence' could realistically be achieved while still retaining real political influence. Also the term 'parliament' did not help clarify matters.

We do live in Russia, and we, the Russian citizens, already have a parliament. There can't be two independent parliaments in one country. (...) an independent parliament means separation from the authorities. (...) I understand this as a [CSO], of which we have a few already.<sup>85</sup>

The opposition to the Initiative Group, centred on people from certain *obshchiny* and the Revda NCA, supported the authorities' model. However, in the end the majority voted for a unitary elected Council of plenipotentiaries of the Sámi, for a transition period until there is a separate law for direct representation of the Sami in the organs of power in Murmansk region.<sup>86</sup> It also elected such a council (commonly referred to as 'SUPS') for a period of two years, until the holding of a Second Congress. While members were elected on an individual basis, SUPS came to include a set of people with backgrounds from AKS, OOSMO, one *obshchina*, the Monchegorsk NCA, and a person who at the time worked for GOU.

The authorities reacted negatively. Speaker Yevgeniy Nikora of the regional parliament stated that «ethnic parliaments are not possible in Russia. You can call it a parliament, but it will not have any real power,»<sup>87</sup> and Nikolay Shushkin of the Legal Projects' Committee told journalists that:

84. Interview, Sovkina, Lovozero 22.04.10.

85. Interview, Nina Sharshina (First Congress, delegate), Lovozero 26.11.09.

86. Saamisups.ucoz.ru: *Resolyutsiya Pervogo S'yezda saamov Murmanskoy oblasti*, <http://saamisups.ucoz.ru/publ/2-1-0-5> (accessed 25.08.10).

87. Finnmarken.no: *Vil ha russisk sameting*, [www.finnmarken.no/Utenriks/article4020187.ece](http://www.finnmarken.no/Utenriks/article4020187.ece) (accessed 25.08.10).



violations of procedure – participation in the voting by citizens of Sámi nationality who were not original delegates, has forced the organs of the executive power to consider this Congress rather [just] a gathering of citizens (...) we will work with them [SUPS] as we would with yet another civil society formation.<sup>88</sup>

The First Congress had made its choice, but the conflict was far from over.

### 3.6. Two councils

In February 2009 the regional government established an advisory and participatory council – the Council of Representatives of Indigenous Minorities of the North (SPKNS) – aimed at the «defence of rights and legal interests» of the Sámi, and entitled to cooperate with international organizations. SPKNS members are chosen by the government for a two-year period based on suggestions from the *obshchiny*. In addition, SPKNS is to include an ethnic Sámi from the regional Public Chamber – currently Yuliya Chuprova of the Revda NCA – and a government representative.<sup>89</sup> Representatives of other regional organs have also taken part in the proceedings at SPKNS meetings.

Let us consider these two councils in light of the SP functions outlined earlier. As for unifying the Sámi, SUPS scores rather highly: it is relatively representative, being elected and including people from several CSOs. Conversely, SPKNS consists of people selected from above, following input from only a limited part of Kola Sámi civil society – the *obshchiny*. However, SPKNS has something SUPS lacks: a modicum of formal influence. For example, SPKNS makes recommendations to the Committee on Cooperation with CSOs and Youth Issues<sup>90</sup> on who should receive subsidies, for which *obshchiny* are eligible in ‘districts of traditional indigenous settlement.’<sup>91</sup> This makes SPKNS a relevant point of orientation for at least the *obshchina* sector.

88. «Siyt sobbar – sto let spustya» in *Lovozerkaya Pravda* 26.12.08.

89. *Postanovleniye o sovete predstaviteley korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa pri pravitel'stve Murmanskoy oblasti* (Art. 1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.5); Gov.murman.ru: *Sostav obshchestvennoy palaty Murmanskoy oblasti*, [www.gov-murman.ru/society/docs/?id=26](http://www.gov-murman.ru/society/docs/?id=26) (accessed 29.12.10).

90. This Committee took over responsibilities for Sámi issues (including being the formal ‘founder’ [*uchrezhditel'*] of GOU) from the Department of Legal Projects in 2009.

91. Currently counted as such are Lovozero, Ter, Kovdor and Kola. According to Viktor Ignatenko at GOU (interview, Murmansk 22.04.10) they are working for Ostrovnoy and Murmansk city to be included (cf. *Poryadok postanovleniya subsidiy iz oblastnogo budzheta obshchinam korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa Murmanskoy oblasti*; *Postanovleniye o sovete predstaviteley korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa pri pravitel'stve Murmanskoy oblasti* (Art 1.2, 1.3.1, 2.5.2, 2.5.3)).

SPKNS has not been an active ‘ambassador’ of the Kola Sámi abroad, indeed there is little awareness of their existence in Nordic Sápmi. To the extent that Nordic media have covered these events at all, focus has been on the First Congress and its election of SUPS. Since SUPS was an initiative of AKS/OOSMO, the traditional Kola Sámi representatives in pan-Sámi affairs, this council has a good point of departure when it comes to establishing contacts with Nordic actors – provided that AKS/OOSMO wants to step down their own international activity to the benefit of the more democratically representative council. SUPS has indeed been represented in some meetings with Nordic Sámi actors since its election.

Regarding the role as a minority-authority link, SUPS obviously plays nowhere near the role of the SPs, since the regional authorities chose to create a ‘counter-council’ rather than work with them. SUPS has, however, been recognized by RAIPON: the council’s leader has been present at RAIPON meetings,<sup>92</sup> and on their homepages SPKNS is not mentioned at all, while it is clearly stated that:

The First Congress of the Sámi (...) founded a national representative organ – the Sámi Parliament. Officially it is called the Council of Plenipotentiaries [SUPS]. The Kola Sámi place great hopes in this organ.<sup>93</sup>

As for SPKNS, one may note that it is more highly-placed in the hierarchy than the Coordination Council was – not beneath GOU, but directly under the government, and with a representative of the latter on board. Even so, two factors reduce their functionality as an indigenous ‘link’ to the authorities: (1) Their low representativeness means that one cannot really see them as spokespeople for the Kola Sámi as such, but rather as a vehicle for communication between the authorities and the *obshchiny* – which is of course an important function in its own right. (2) As noted earlier, all existing SPs are financially dependent on the very states they at times need to confront, but SPKNS’s dependency may be said to run deeper: not just the organ, but the *obshchiny* themselves are to some extent dependent on Murmansk region. *Obshchiny* receive regional subsidies, and even more importantly need land to pursue their goal of reviving traditional economic activities. Stammeler has pointed out that whether an *obshchina* «succeeds in getting land registered or not depends largely on the goodwill of all actors.»<sup>94</sup> One such actor is Murmansk region, which leases out land to *obshchiny* for set periods of time. This arguably makes it unwise for *obshchiny* to anger the authorities – and hence makes it less likely they will challenge them over controversial matters.

92. Interview, Sovkina, Lovozero 22.04.10.

93. Raipon.info: *Saami*, [www.raipon.info/index.php/narody/narody-severa-sibiri-i-dalnego-vostoka-rf/252-2009-08-20-13-54-58](http://www.raipon.info/index.php/narody/narody-severa-sibiri-i-dalnego-vostoka-rf/252-2009-08-20-13-54-58) (accessed 15.09.10).

94. Stammeler 2005 pp. 116

### 3.7. The Kola Sámi Assembly

In December 2010 the Second Congress of the Murmansk Region Sámi was held. Being organized by activists rather than the authorities, this event naturally could not result in the establishment of any official organ. Nevertheless, the Congress on December 12 elected a 'Kola Sámi Assembly' – in Russian simply called the *Saamskiy parlament*, the same term used for the Nordic SPs, and in Kildin Sámi called *Kuellnegk Nyoark Sam' Sobbar*,<sup>95</sup> referring back to the '*Koladak Sobbar*' of earlier times. Like SUPS before it, the Assembly is to work for an official Russian SP and represent the Kola Sámi domestically and internationally. Three SUPS members were elected to the Assembly: N. Afanas'yeva, Andrey Danilov, and V. Sovkina – the latter serving as leader.<sup>96</sup> The other six individuals in the Assembly are associated with AKS, the Monchegorsk NCA, OOSMO, the Russian branch of the Sámi Womens' Forum, the youth organization Sam' Nurash, the Lovozero-based '*sovkhoz*' 'Tundra,' and the *obshchina* 'Yona'. While SUPS had a member also participating in SPKNS, this is not the case with the Assembly.

When Nordic media broke the news, the Assembly was at times indeed referred to as a 'Russian Sámi Parliament' (e.g. Norw. *sameparlament*), but notably the term which is used for the existing Nordic SPs (Norw. *sameting*) was applied to the structure less often. On the whole, rather than describing the Kola Sámi Assembly as a fully-fledged Russian SP, Nordic media portrayed it as another important step towards one.<sup>97</sup> As for Russian reactions, one must take into account that at the time of writing these are still quite recent events, but one may note that GOU had not yet mentioned the establishment of the Assembly on their website's news section. RAIPON, conversely, rapidly published an article about the event.<sup>98</sup> At this time one may only observe that the Kola Sámi Assembly seems identical with SUPS in

95. Kildin Sámi is the largest of the four Sámi languages traditionally spoken on the Kola Peninsula. According to Scheller (2011, pp. 86–8) it has about 100 active speakers and 700 people have some knowledge of it. Scheller points out that although Kola Sámi knowledge of their traditional languages is not that widespread, Sámi language nevertheless has an important symbolic function for the group (op. cit, p. 84).

96. Saamisups.ucoz.ru: *Resheniye Vtorogo S"yezda korennoy malochislennogo naroda severa Murmanskoy oblasti – Saami*. [http://saamisups.ucoz.ru/publ/vtoroj\\_sezd\\_saamov\\_murman-skoj\\_oblasti/reshenie/4-1-0-36](http://saamisups.ucoz.ru/publ/vtoroj_sezd_saamov_murman-skoj_oblasti/reshenie/4-1-0-36) (accessed 29.12.10).

97. Cf. *Sárgat* 17.12.10, pp. 2, 14; Gáldu.org: *Klart for sameparlament i Russland*, [www.galdu.org/web/index.php?odas=5010&giella1=nor](http://www.galdu.org/web/index.php?odas=5010&giella1=nor) (accessed 29.12.10); Nrk.no: *Historisk samisk dag i Russland*, [http://nrk.no/kanal/nrk\\_sami\\_radio/1.7422494](http://nrk.no/kanal/nrk_sami_radio/1.7422494) (accessed 29.12.10).

98. Gov.murman.ru: *Novosti*, [www.gov-murman.ru/natpers/news/](http://www.gov-murman.ru/natpers/news/) (accessed 30.12.10). Raipon.info: *V Murmanske proshyol S"yezd kol'skikh saamov*, [www.raipon.info/index.php/component/content/article/1-novosti/1474-v-murmanske-proshel-sezd-kolskih-saamov](http://www.raipon.info/index.php/component/content/article/1-novosti/1474-v-murmanske-proshel-sezd-kolskih-saamov) (accessed 30.12.10).

its basic characteristics – although with a more recently-confirmed democratic legitimacy. Time will tell whether this structure is to achieve more influence and recognition than SUPS did.

## 4. Conclusion

This article has outlined attempts over the last two decades to create a unifying Kola Sámi representative structure – most of which were either directly inspired by the Sámi Parliaments, or created as a reaction to activists' desires to import this same Nordic model.

The first discussions of the early 1990s never 'took off,' remaining for the most part an internal AKS debate. But even then there was some friction between authority representatives and activists over the issue. In any case, a Kola SP was not much in demand at the time, and AKS was already fulfilling some functions associated with the institution.

As Kola Sámi politics entered its multipolar phase, the need for a unifying structure increased. OOSMO and Infonor began a project initially inspired by the SPs, which rapidly morphed into something altogether different – the establishment of Sámi NCAs.

In 2004–2006 Murmansk region created the GOU/Coordination Council system, which had potential but was marred by antagonism and dissatisfaction with the amount of Sámi representatives' influence. The Coordination Council was dissolved, but GOU remains an actor in Murmansk region's Sámi politics, working closely with the government and SPKNS. Notably, though, all Sámi GOU employees – including the leader – left their posts in 2009.

In 2007 AKS/OOSMO embarked on a cooperative venture to establish a Kola SP. The ensuing conflict resulted in the establishment of two structures – each claiming to represent the Kola Sámi – the elected SUPS/Kola Sámi Assembly, and the official SPKNS.

Critics may argue that activism aimed at importing the Nordic model to Russia has led to increased tension between the Kola Sámi political elite and the regional authorities, and also now 'institutionalized' internal conflict. Perhaps predictably, in reaction to grass-roots demands for introduction of a foreign institution, the authorities have tried to 'reject the transplant,' causing an escalation of conflict between pressure groups and authorities. However, official indigenous assemblies are not actually all that alien to Russia – a similar organ existed on the Kola Peninsula a century ago, and current Russian law does allow both for official indigenous

representative bodies as well as indigenous quotas in the regional parliaments.<sup>99</sup> The parliament of Khanty-Mansi autonomous area has a subsection of elected representatives – the Assembly of Representatives of Indigenous Minorities of the North<sup>100</sup> – and Khabarovsk territory has an elected, consultative, indigenous body under the office of the Governor.<sup>101</sup> While such structures are not the norm in Russia, they illustrate that although the demands of Kola Sámi activists are inspired by, and their discourse colored by, a Nordic model – it still seems possible to find a solution that addresses their basic demands whilst simultaneously respecting federal legislation.

Several intended as well as unintended consequences of pro-SP activism may be seen as positive: (1) the activism kick-started the process leading to establishment of Sámi NCAs, gathering people from different CSOs; (2) the common goal has helped normalize the AKS-OOSMO relationship, facilitating increased cooperation; (3) in the SUPS/Kola Sámi Assembly, the Kola Sámi have achieved their most unifying and representative structure to date; (4) the holding of congresses of elected representatives also heralds a breakthrough in this respect; and (5) the creation of SPKNS can be seen as empowering for the *obshchiny*.

Whether or not the Kola Sámi will eventually have a representative, unifying organ to voice their demands *vis-à-vis* the authorities depends in large part on the extent to which Sámi leaders and Murmansk region authorities manage to cooperate and compromise. As for the desire to obtain ‘full rights’ in pan-Sámi cooperation, that is to some extent up to the Nordic Sámi – it is theirs to decide when a Kola Sámi political entity is eligible to be accepted as a ‘Russian Sámi Parliament,’ and hence receive a place in the Sámi Parliamentary Cooperation.

## List of Russian Sámi political entities mentioned in the text

AKS: *Assotsiyatsiya Kol'skikh Saamov*, Association of the Kola Sámi. Murmansk city-centered CSO (est.1989). Represented in Sámi Council and RAIPON.

Committee for Indigenous Issues: *Komitet po delam korennnykh malochislennykh narodov Severa*, Committee for affairs of the indigenous minorities of the North.

99. Xanthaki 2004 p. 86

100. Wessendorf, K: *An indigenous parliament?*, pp. 59–60, 68–73; *Ustav (Osnovnoy zakon) khanty-manskiyskogo avtonomnogo okruga – Yugry* (Arts. 1.2, 23.2, 27.1, 27.3, 49.1); cf. Dumahmao. ru: *Assembleya predstaviteley korennnykh malochislennykh narodov severa* ([www.dumahmao.ru/top/tmc/assemblyoftherepresentativesofthenorth/](http://www.dumahmao.ru/top/tmc/assemblyoftherepresentativesofthenorth/) – accessed 28.08.10).

101. Anaya, J. *Report of the Special Rapporteur ...* pp. 15, 21.

Existed in various incarnations and under different departments of Murmansk region government, 1994–2004. Replaced by GOU.

Coordinating Council: *Koordinatsionniy sovet pri gosudarstvennom oblastnom uchrezhdenii 'Murmanskiy oblastnoy tsentr korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa'*, Coordination council under [GOU]. Advisory council established by GOU (2006–2008), constituted by representatives of all Sámi CSOs in Murmansk region.

Congresses: *S'yezd korenного malochislennogo naroda Rossiyskoy Federatsiy (Saamov) prozhivayushchego v Murmanskoy oblasti*, Congresses of the indigenous minority of the Russian Federation (Sámi) living in Murmansk region. First Congress of elected Sámi delegates held in Olenegorsk, 2008, elected SUPS. Second Congress held in Murmansk city, 2010, elected Kola Sámi Assembly.

GOU: *Gosudarstvennoye Oblastnoye Uchrezhdeniye 'Tsentr korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa'*, the Official Regional Agency 'the Centre for indigenous minorities of the North.' Established in 2004 by regional authorities to assist in the creation, coordination, and execution of Sámi policy.

Initiative Group: *Initiativnaya gruppa po sozdaniyu Parlamenta saami Murmanskoy oblasti*, Initiative group for the founding of a parliament for the Murmansk region Sámi. AKS/OOSMO-based committee (2008) that worked for the realization of a Russian SP. Suggested creation of SUPS.

Kola Sámi Assembly: *Saamskiy parlament, Kueledagk Nyoark Sam' Sobbar*. Elected in 2010 by the Second Congress to represent the Sámi.

NCA: *Natsional'no-kul'turnye avtonomii*, National-cultural autonomies. City-based CSOs (Apatity, Monchegorsk, Revda) to protect Sámi culture and identity (first established 2007).

*Obshchiny*: Kin/community-based non-commercial membership organizations for indigenous people, aimed at the preservation of traditional lifestyles (first Sámi *obshchina* established 2002).

RAIPON: *Assotsiyatsiya korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa, Sibiri i Dal'nego Vostoka Rossiyskoy Federatsiy*, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North. Umbrella organization (est. 1990), headquarters in Moscow. AKS is a founding member, has contacts with OOSMO and SUPS.

SUPS: *Sovet upolnomochennykh predstaviteley saamov Murmanskoy Oblasti, Kuellnegk sam' sobbar'*, the Council of plenipotentiaries of the Murmansk region Sámi. Elected in 2008 by the First Congress to represent the Sámi.

SPKNS: *Sovet predstaviteley korennykh malochislennykh narodov Severa pri pravitelstve Murmanskoy Oblasti*, the Council of representatives of the indigenous minorities of the North under the government of Murmansk region. Council of selected *obshchina* representatives (established 2009) to advise the government on Sámi policy.

OOSMO: *Obshchestvennaya organizatsiya saamov Murmanskoy Oblasti*, the Non-Governmental Organization of the Murmansk Region Sámi. Lovozero-centered CSO (est. 1998). Represented in Sámi Council, RAIPON «cultivates contacts» with them.<sup>102</sup>

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## Движение за создание Саамского парламента в России

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### **Краткое содержание**

В этой статье анализируется движение коренного малочисленного народа Севера России Саамы за улучшение своего положения путем создания Саамского Парламента. Саамские Парламенты, официальные органы, состоящие из выборных представителей коренного народа, уже в течение 20 лет существуют в Скандинавских странах и в Финляндии. В статье представлены наиболее важные российские инициативы по созданию такого органа в период 1989 – 2010 годов и их результаты. Самой важной причиной движения за создание Российского Саамского Парламента в текущем тысячелетии был факт отсутствия на российской почве общей политической структуры для разных групп российских саамов; структуры, которая могла бы легитимно представить их в отношениях с властями. До сих пор у российских саамов пока нет такого органа. В настоящее время существует неофициальный выборный орган Куэллнэгк Неарк Самь Соббар, созданный через совместный проект нескольких общественных организаций российских саамов, и официальный Совет Представителей коренного малочисленного народа Севера в Мурманской области, состоящий из людей, назначенных общинами российских саамов и выбранных Губернатором области.

*Ключевые слова:* политика в отношении Саами, права коренных народов, этническая политика, российское гражданское общество, представленность меньшинств.